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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Dominican Leadership Conference, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and UNANIMA International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

We are NGOs who have committed ourselves and our resources to speak and act with others towards global justice for those made poor especially women and the girl child. The persons with whom we live and work and the stories we hear daily speak of the survival struggle of women who are migrant workers; asylum seekers and refugees; indigenous women; women affected by HIV/AIDS and conflict situations; women who have no employment formal or informal; female heads of households; women who have no access to credit or water to drink or to use in their fields. We see daily the increased feminization of poverty even when these same women are contributing partners in the economy. They are the working poor.

> From India: Mrs. Guddi 37-year old woman a polio patient is a daily wage laborer with two daughters and a young son. Her elder daughter is mute. Having no husband she has to fend for her family. Guddi is a member of 'AZAD' (Free) Women's Self Help Group formed in January 2003. The members collect Rs. 20/- per month as saving. Since then she has availed herself of loans 11 times from her group.

> From Zimbabwe: My husband is a domestic worker so he does not earn a lot. We have a free room, light and water and sometimes food from the house. I was a Career Nurse but am now retired. Since I retired I started selling vegetables, pop-corn and other items of demand which people looked for on their way to work or on their way home and shops were too far away. I helped to educate my children this way and later I supplemented my husband's earnings so we could live better.

We applaud the request that the Secretary-General's next study be "Women's control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance." [1]

The multiplier effect of investing in women's development has been well documented by the UN and other field agencies. So too have been the negative results when women are left out. When girls and women have access to a quality education, good health care and decent work, their societies reap both social and economic resources. We believe that a quality education is of primary importance. When a woman is educated she will seek health care for herself and her family. And, with that education she can find decent work through which she can contribute to her society.

> To educate a girl is to educate a whole family. .....Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, lower infant and maternal mortality, improve nutrition and promote health – including helping to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation. [2]

Undeniable as well are the adverse effects when women do not have access to education.

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[1] Resolution A/C.2/60/L.64 Women in Development, 9 December 2005.

[2] Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General. UNICEF State of the World's Children 2004. Girl's Education and Development.

> What can I do now – life is so hard. There are no jobs and we are not allowed to be self-employed. I really do not know what exactly did we do to de erve this? It has become as a rule not to survive, yet it becomes compulsory to say we are 'iving peacefully. I have to pay the new term's school fees. Surely they will not go to schoo And, how will I tell them this. They are doing well. For a mother it is breaking my heart to en think of the future. My children and I are struggling and we are really desperate - wher will help come for us? I get sick with worry.

Additionally, we need to emphasize women's economic empowerment. We strongly agree "that empowering people, particularly women, to strengthen their own capacities is a main objective of development and its principal resource. Empowerment requires the full participation of people in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions determining the functioning and well-being of our societies."[3] Gender budgeting and auditing are essential. And, we are pleased that a strong link between poverty eradication and gender equality is recognized in many UN resolutions. Blatant inequality is highlighted in all of the "equality studies" this year: the 2005 Human Development Report (UNDP), World Development Report 2006 (World Bank), Predicament of Inequality: Report on the World Social Situation 2005 (UNDESA), and World Economic and Social Survey 2005 (UNDESA). They argue strongly the need for equal access to systems especially education, health, and work. "Gender dimensions are deeply embedded in observed inequalities."[4]

For that reason we need to work on the structural underpinnings of our economic systems. Many of us have been involved in the process of Financing for Development since the earliest Preparation Commissions for Monterrey and continue this work with the new NGO Committee on Financing for Development. Women's development issues surrounding trade are myriad. We read, "The global wealth of nations has multiplied sevenfold in the past 50 years and international trade has grown even more dramatically; yet poverty among women has only increased."[5] At the recent Hong Kong WTO meeting many of our NGOs emphasized women's human rights and participation in the trading system especially in decision-making.

> Rights are associated with property holders and WTO agreements place land in the hands of wealthy men and the transnational corporations.
> This has contributed to the erosion of women's rights, notably women's right to self-sufficiency and self-determination.[6]

Indigenous women have highlighted the importance of intellectual property rights:

> "We recall that Indigenous Peoples extensive knowledge of the plants and animals on our lands, has historically been developed, shared and used collectively, and has been systematically robbed most recently via

[3] World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development - Part II.
[4] The Inequality Predicament Report on the World Social Situation 2005, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, A/60/117/Rev.1, ST/ESA/299.
[5] INSTRAW study Conclusion - Beijing at 10 – Women and Poverty.
[6] Beijing+10 Meets WTO+10: Women's Rights Activists Take Aim at the WTO By Nadia Johnson, USGTN & Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO) December 15, 2005, Hong Kong.

> international trade rules like the World Trade Organization's TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights), which fail to recognize collective intellectual property rights and facilitate the piracy of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge by individuals and corporations."[7]

And so with the Roman Catholic Bishops of the United States. and Latin America we urge that trade agreements be ones: "that stimulate economic growth while at the same time giving priority to integral human development that builds solidarity, improves the common good of all, and in an essential way reduces poverty, exclusion and hunger."[8] *Freedom of trade is fair only when it is in accord with the demands of justice.*[9]

Recommendations:

1. Use a quota system to assure that women are involved in national parliaments/ legislatures as well as local decision-making bodies.
2. Provide space for consultation with Women's critical analysis at every level for new ways to promote development.
3. Assure that the decisions made to take advantage of trade as an engine of growth are pro-women.
4. Assure that Trade rules protect the intellectual property rights of indigenous peoples.
5. Use Gandhi's axiom: Ask if your decisions will help the poorest.
6. Enable national governments to provide for the social obligations to their citizens and do not force privatization of public goods which affect women and children.
7. Provide the political commitment and adequate resources for all national and UN programs that empower women.
8. Exhort all governments that have not done so to sign on to CEDAW and its optional protocol assuring that women have equal rights in every aspect of their lives.
9. Use as a Resource Women, Development, and the UN by Devaki Jain to understand the 60 year history with insights for the path forward.

The above statement is endorsed and supported by the following non-governmetnal organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Action aides aux familles démunies, Baha'i International Community, Congregations of St. Joseph, Grail, International Council of Women, International Federation for Home Economics, Loretto Community and School Sisters of Notre Dame.

[7] International Indigenous Women's Forum Declaration, New York, 27 of February, 2005.
[8] Joint Communiqué of Catholic Bishops participating in the "Ecumenical Meeting on Integration in the Americas", September 8, 2005.
[9] Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church 2005, 366 Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace, USCCB Publishing, Washington, D.C.